

# Positive Practices in Building Harmonious Households in Terengganu

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores positive behavioural practices among married Muslim couples in Terengganu that contribute to harmonious family life. Using a qualitative design through semi-structured interviews with nine participants, the study identifies key themes of marital well-being, including mutual respect, patience, shared responsibility, emotional support, tolerance, communication, and spiritual practices. The findings reveal that sustainable happiness within a family is closely tied to Islamic moral values. The study concludes that positive marital practices among Muslim couples in Terengganu are grounded in Islamic ethical principles that promote *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (compassion) within the family.

**Keywords:** Positive marital practices, Muslim family, Terengganu, Islamic ethics, Family well-being

## INTRODUCTION

The divorce rate in Malaysia has continued to show an upward trend, and this phenomenon is also evident in the state of Terengganu, which is located on the eastern coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Based on marriage and divorce records from the late 1940s to the 1950s, the east coast states were found to have higher divorce rates compared to those on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Kelantan recorded the highest divorce rate, with 70.96% of cases reported, followed by Terengganu, which had the second-highest rate at 71.27% (Haryati Hasan, 2021).

In essence, the high divorce rate in Terengganu is not a new issue. To this day, the problem of divorce continues to persist within the Muslim community in the state and has been actively addressed by the Terengganu state government (Wan Mohd Yusof et al., 2017). This initiative aligns with the objectives of the National Family Policy, which aims to promote family well-being and ensure social stability across the nation.

The family serves as the most important agent of socialization in society, responsible for transmitting positive values to future generations (Rohana, 2014). Divorce inevitably disrupts family functioning, and the failure of families to operate effectively can result in negative consequences, contributing to increased social misconduct (Norhayati & Zaidah, 2016; Nuraimirah et al., 2019; Jagdeep, 2021).

Therefore, maintaining well-being within the household is essential to ensure that families can play their roles effectively. This study, therefore, seeks to identify the positive practices among married couples in fostering harmonious family relationships. It is hoped that this effort will contribute to the development of happier and more resilient families in Terengganu.

## METHODOLOGY

This study applied a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand participants' experiences in managing their marital relationships. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine married couples who have been married for more than ten years and residing in Kuala Terengganu. Participants were selected

using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who were considered to have stable and long-term marital experiences. This group was selected as they have passed the critical phase of marriage. Marriages within the first 1–10 years are categorized as the initial phase, which involves the process of getting to know each other, adaptation, and life adjustments (Siti Marziah Zakaria et al., 2019). The first phase of marriage is often associated with a period of crisis. The ability of couples to successfully navigate this phase ensures marital stability and the continuity of the family institution (Hamid, 2021).

The interviews explored two main questions: (1) What positive behaviours are expected and practiced within their households? (2) What negative behaviours are avoided to sustain harmony? The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their views freely while maintaining a focus on positive marital practices and family well-being. All responses were transcribed, coded, and categorized using thematic analysis. The data analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, which involves six systematic phases: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Mutual Respect and Effective Communication

All participants emphasized that respect and good communication are the foundation of marital harmony. Respecting one's spouse involves the willingness to listen, speaking politely, and appreciating each other's opinions. According to Ninawati (2018), the aspect of communication plays a vital role in achieving and forming a family characterized by *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love), and *rahmah* (compassion). Communication is essential for husbands and wives to understand and express each other's needs and feelings. Good communication, such as paying attention to what the partner says, helps make one feel valued (Fadillah, 2016). Effective resolution of marital conflict is achieved through communication (Nuraini & Marziah, 2021). Previous studies on marital quality have also found that positive communication between husband and wife is highly effective in fostering happiness and prolonging the duration of marriage (Liana Mat Nayan et al., 2016; Suzana Mohd Hoesni et al., 2016; Nuraini & Marziah, 2021).

### 2. Tolerance, Patience, and Emotional Support

Several participants explained that patience and tolerance are the main qualities needed to face conflicts. They believed that couples who support each other during times of hardship maintain a stronger bond. Rahman and Awang (2004) stated that the supportive traits and responses of a partner during difficult situations can enhance an individual's trust and confidence in their spouse. Meanwhile, according to Holmes (1989), trust has a lasting impact on individuals, where a high level of trust contributes positively to marital relationships. In fact, tolerance, mutual understanding, and mutual respect are among the key elements required in a household to achieve a quality marriage (Asila & Siti Marziah, 2019).

### 3. Shared Responsibilities and Cooperation

Participants highlighted collaboration in household duties and shared responsibility in parenting as crucial for a peaceful home. Since the wives involved in this study were working women, it can be understood that they expected their husbands' cooperation to ease their burden in managing household responsibilities. In reality, wives bear a significant share of household responsibilities and do not have enough time to complete all tasks at once, including caring for the children (Noor Rahamah, 2012). Therefore, wives need a support system, especially from their husbands, to fulfil both responsibilities in a balanced and effective manner (Mohd Ismail & Bushrah, 2014). This finding also indicates that they oppose patriarchal norms that restrict domestic duties to one gender. Based on previous studies, happy couples were found to consistently cooperate in handling tasks and to be more tolerant in maintaining family happiness (Fadillah, 2016; Asila & Siti Marziah, 2019).

### 4. Spiritual Practices and Religious Commitment

Several participants highlighted the importance of spiritual practices within the household. Some expressed their hope for their husbands to consistently lead congregational prayers at home. For them, praying together, making

collective supplications, and engaging in family worship are practices that cultivate inner peace and strengthen emotional and spiritual bonds among family members. The concept of religion is one of the fundamental aspects that helps build family well-being. Religious-based practices and values can assist in managing family crises effectively (Abdul Rashid & Nurun Najihah, 2023).

## 5. Avoidance of Negative Traits

Apart from exploring positive practices within the household, participants were also share their views on undesirable behaviours that may affect marital harmony. Based on the interviews, the undesirable behaviours from a spouse include being hot-tempered, aggressive, poor in communication, irresponsible, not punctual, breaking promises, dishonest, egoistic, and lacking empathy. Abdul Rashid and Nurun Najihah (2023) emphasized that husbands and wives should strive to avoid actions that can create conflict within the household. Negative attitudes and undesirable behaviours of spouses are among the factors that contribute to divorce (Fadillah, 2016; Mohd Rasydan & Mohd Norsuhairi, 2024). This matter should be given due attention by married couples in order to preserve marital harmony.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that positive marital practices among Muslim couples in Terengganu are grounded in Islamic ethical principles that promote *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (affection), and *rahmah* (compassion) within the family. The findings further suggest that values such as respect, patience, effective communication, and spiritual devotion are key determinants of marital happiness in Terengganu.

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